

Strathspey & Badenoch HERALD

COMMENT

HERALD NO 5063 • RECORD NO 5883

Animal magic in wrangle of the crossing

A DEVOUT cowboy loses his favourite Bible while mending fences out on the range.

Three weeks later, a zebra walks up to him carrying the Bible in its mouth.

The cowboy couldn't believe his eyes.

He takes the precious book out of the zebra's mouth, raises his eyes heavenward and exclaims: "It's a miracle!"

"Not really," says the zebra, "your name is written inside the cover."

If only Highland Council had applied the same common sense approach to the zebra crossing in Aviemore, a lot of chaos could have been avoided in the village centre.

It is something of a minor miracle that local authority road officials have now finally listened to community concerns expressed repeatedly and loudly for the past 15 years when the crossing was installed in front of the then new Tesco store.

The zebra is to be replaced by a puffin. Now where did we put that joke book?

Heavy price paid in Great War battle

THE Battle of Festubert in World War I took a terrible toll on the 4th Cameron Highlanders and the communities across the region from which they hailed.

Those involved with shinty in Kingussie and Skye came together last week on the isle to remember the devastating losses suffered a century ago.

The Badenoch capital paid a bloody price in the World War I battle, with 10 men killed, including two members of the town's shinty team which, just a few months earlier, had lifted the Camanachd Cup.

In today's "Strathy" we bring a contemporary account from the Front at Festubert, penned home by a local unnamed Territorial. The terms are pragmatic and pride shines through that this soldier's company achieved its objective.

He lived to fight another day but what became of this hero, like so many others, we will never know.

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Readers' letters

Flats development would destroy the amenity of Grampian Court

Sir, I refer to the article in this week's "Strathy" concerning the proposed building of 35 one and two-bedroom flats and an associated car park on land off Grampian Road, with a vehicular access road into the car park via Grampian Court entering from Grampian Road.

I am disappointed that there is local support for the project. If it goes ahead it will cause months of disruption to the town and Grampian Road, as well as to the street where I live in Grampian Court, which currently affords unrestricted views over the proposed site.

The first I heard about it was a couple of weeks ago when I received a mailshot letter from the planners inviting me to attend an informal meeting.

Grampian Court is an attractive, tree-lined street with 33 flats built more than 20 years ago on what was the old Co-op in Aviemore. The flats are occupied by both tenants and owners and some are let as holiday homes. The building disruption would be ongoing for months.

Of concern is the loss of amenity space which has been available for years to the public and is enjoyed by everyone locally and by holiday-makers visiting Aviemore.

It serves as a local park for all to enjoy. Charity runs take place every year through the park; cricket matches take place; dog-walkers use it, families have picnics; and during the winter families enjoy sledding down the hills.

I would question if, by law, this amenity can be withdrawn from public use after so many years of access. I would like to keep any green spaces available in the village.

Should this proposed development succeed, it would give the green light for Macdonalds to go ahead with what it calls its "masterplan", selling off even more land. Is this necessary?

In 2008 a development proposal on the site in question was rejected and the chopping down of trees was one reason taken into consideration. I look forward to reading



LIVING SPACE: How the retirement flats proposed by McCarthy and Stone might look.

the community councillors' report from the meeting they had with the agents for the proposed development.

My objections to it are as follows:

- The design for the building is out of keeping with the existing style of properties in Grampian Court. It looks too dominant and overbearing in terms of the existing properties and would affect the character of the street. The loss of existing views would adversely affect the residential amenity of my flat directly.

- Increased noise and disturbance caused by vehicles coming and going via the 35-vehicle car park would be unacceptable.

- A greater sense of being hemmed-in due to the close proximity and height of the building would directly impact on the outlook of Grampian Court.

- The open aspect from my own flat would be taken away and replaced by a 35-vehicle car park and an entrance road into the car park directly opposite my main living room window and bedrooms causing a loss of privacy.

- Daylight would be diminished by the flats.

- Public enjoyment and loss of the green amenity area.

- Over 250 species are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, many of which live on the proposed site (hares, birds, butterflies and red squirrels).

Increasing vehicle numbers significantly would require a higher level of maintenance to the road surface by Highland Council, particularly during winter months.

This was the case last year when many vehicles were stuck for three days in the street in heavy snow and ice.

There is a damaged water main at the entrance to Grampian Court which has dropped significantly into the tarmac in recent months and more vehicles would cause damage to this mains drain.

Grampian Court would no longer be classed as a cul-de-sac road as upwards of 35 vehicles would be turning into the new development car park.

The dangers of vehicles coming and going into the street would mean children residing in Grampian Court being unable to play safely outside their homes.

Yours etc,
Janette Gardner,
12, Grampian Court,
Aviemore.

It's a sign of the times that they can't get it right

Sir, Over many months there have been a few accidents at the "Fisherman's Bends" on the A95 just east of Drummuillie.

BEAR Scotland checks the road every week for faults, and the road has recently been resurfaced, with white lines painted over a number of days. Yet no-one has bothered to turn the bend warning sign around the right way. It has been like this for months.

Warning signs are not usually put on the opposite side of the carriageway for the vehicles they are meant for.

However, the sign for "blind summit" just beyond the bend warning sign is on the opposite side of the road.

I wonder if that has caused an element of confusion?

If a driver goes off on the Fisherman's Bends while heading



ROUND THE BEND: The A95 and the offending bend sign.

towards Aviemore, could he make a claim that the signage had not been effectively maintained?

Yours etc,
Nigel Williams,
Dulnain Bridge.

Get it off your mind. We want to hear your views on the stories that are making the headlines in the Strathy and the things that are getting you hot under the collar. Send your letters to the Strathspey & Badenoch Herald, 44 High Street, Grantown, PH26 3EH or by email to editorial@sbherald.co.uk. We need a name and full address for publication. If requested we may withhold the details of those submitting letters from publication but we need all correspondents' details for our own information. The editor reserves the right to edit letters for clarity or to fit the space available. We would ask that correspondence is no more than 300 words please.

Well disguised verbal attack

Sir, While browsing Amazon for books about the Caledonian pinewoods I came across an interesting "review" of George Monbiot's *Feral* written by the Amazon user Mr J N Reynolds, dated June 14, 2014.

This "review" is not all it appears to be. It's quite cleverly done, beginning as it does by praising the writing of George Monbiot and "his source material diligently and comprehensively referenced".

About half way through, the real point is revealed – a thinly disguised personal attack on Adam Watson, Dick Balharry and Basil Dunlop.

Mr Reynolds writes: "His chapters on restoring elements of Caledonian pinewoods through planting are worth reading, and way ahead of the tired and outdated views of the past that are still stubbornly clung on to by folk such as Watson, Balharry and Dunlop."

"In the world of restoration ecology, the views of these dinosaurs have been supplanted by a new, laudable vision held by those who are trying to bring back the biodiversity and variety to our landscape."

You might say that's one man's opinion, but it's interesting that:

- He's in favour of (so called) restoration by planting (as RSPB Scotland is at Abernethy);
- He made a point of only naming Watson, Balharry and Dunlop before characterising them "dinosaurs";
- Watson, Balharry and Dunlop collaborated on the "Statement of Concern" in which they voiced their concerns about RSPB Scotland's planting plans for Abernethy;
- The name of RSPB Scotland's head of media and communications is James Reynolds. A coincidence? I think not.

Yours etc,
Joe Dordward,
Bracknell.

The stigma of mental health

Sir, The national programme to end mental health discrimination, SEE Me, wants to discover how the lives of people in the Highlands with mental health conditions are being stigmatised.

To do this we are looking for people to become community champions, leaders in the area who identify where discrimination exists and take action to change it.

See Me currently has community champions in other areas of the country who are tackling mental health stigmatisation at universities, with young people in the east end of Glasgow and in health care.

The champions, who have personal experience of mental illness themselves, went through a four-day training programme, carried out over six months, to develop the skills they needed to target the areas where issues exist.

We know that two out of three people with mental illness stop some day-to-day activities for fear of being stigmatised and discriminated against. This is unacceptable and limits their opportunity to lead fulfilled lives.

One of the ways we are challenging this is through the leadership programme.

The programme empowers people to become leaders in their local areas, who can inspire communities to take action against stigma and discrimination.

It creates more connected and healthier communities where people with mental health problems are supported. This is particularly important in rural areas, where social isolation can exacerbate mental health problems.

For information on applying go to www.seemescotland.org/our-movement-for-change/supporters/champions/ or contact me on 0141 530 1093 or email rebekah.moore@seemescotland.org

Yours etc,
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